

Seattle Light Rail Review Panel

Meeting Notes for March 15, 2000

Agenda Items

Schematic Design Briefing on the Maintenance Base Facility

Commissioners Present

Matthew Kitchen
Jay Lazerwitz
Jack Mackie
Rick Sundberg
Paul Tomita

Staff Present

Debora Ashland, Sound Transit
Marty Curry, Planning Commission
Barbara Goldstein, Arts Commission
Cheryl Sizov, LRRP

In Jon Layzer's absence, Rick Sundberg chaired the meeting. LRRP business was moved to the end of the agenda and the maintenance base facility briefing commenced.

Schematic Design Briefing for the Maintenance Base Facility

Greg Baldwin, ZGF

Mike Merrick, Sound Transit

Tad Savinar, STart

Mike Merrick began the presentation with an overview of the location and context of the proposed Maintenance Base, along with a description of the site. Sound Transit's first task will be clear the site of existing buildings. This area used to be tidal flats, so we are conducting geotechnical studies now. The east side of the site will be train storage tracks along with a maintenance shed to hold 96 cars. The train tracks lead to the maintenance facility for both heavy and light maintenance. The mainline passes the site at the north end as an aerial alignment with two ramps down to the yard. There is also a car wash on the south end of the site for cleaning trains daily. Other features include:

- *A building housing the controls for the electrical system, overhead catenary system, and train controls*
- *Parking for the operations and maintenance staff on-site*
- *Building to house administrative staff*

One issue is how to avoid impacting the major utility system that are on-site—there is a major storm sewer as well as a combined sewer outfall pipe under the proposed maintenance building. These two systems connect when there is a storm and overflow of water. The shop location was adjusted to accommodate these existing utilities.

Greg Baldwin, ZGF Architects, continued the presentation with a short discussion of the implications of the industrial context on design of the facility. We want to acknowledge both the old industrial uses that have existed here for a long time, and the new non-industrial uses moving in such as Tully's. The Sound Transit Maintenance Base facility is bringing additional employment to the area. In addition to the staff on-site, we want to accommodate visitors to the site. We anticipate this could be a popular tour stop for school groups, along with the Tully's operation. One thing that makes this maintenance base fascinating is that mechanics will be working both above and below the train cars, so we're creating several levels of

workspace all of which will be visible from the 4-story administration building, yet separate from the workers and work space. There will be pedestrian public access along the face of the east side of the administrative building and the tracks. The administration building is really a "building on top of a building;" 4 levels connected by a central core. To minimize conflicts there will be separate employee and visitor access. A cafeteria for employees is located on the top floor. We did several light studies to understand what the quality of light would be like inside the maintenance bays. There will be suspended mezzanines for employees to work from above.

At the Sound Transit internal design review, there was some criticism that the skeleton of the building is not well articulated on the outside. I am personally resistant to developing a strong exoskeleton because of the cost due to the complexity of construction and the fact that it is easy to become carried away with expression that one is trying to make. The brick cladding is appropriate to the type of earlier industrial buildings found in Pioneer Square and at Union Station.. I'm not bothered by treating it as a veneer; what does the Panel think? The base is pre-cast concrete and painted metal for the rest of the building.

Tad Savinar joined the presentation, stating that he also agrees with Greg on reflecting the changing context that is this industrial area. I initially had many ideas about incorporating art into the metal building, but as the design evolved into such a beautiful form itself, I feel less compelled to add art there. Instead I'm looking at the rest of the facility and railyard for art opportunities. There is inspiration in several neighborhood vertical elements such as the Starbucks tower, Fran's bread clock. The 300' ramp where visitors travel to the building adjacent to the east-facing window is a good place to tell a story; perhaps something that would prepare visitors for the activities they will see once inside. I would also like to treat the employee's entrance with art. There are four trestles supporting the Rainier Brewery pedestrian access across Airport Way that could be salvaged and combined to create a landmark of some kind. Some of the neighboring buildings actually have quite sophisticated landscaping around them; it would be interesting to feature machines fully expressed within a natural setting. When the building design was more aggressive in terms of materials, I was worried about the face we would be presenting to Alaskan Copper and the neighborhood, but now I'm not concerned. The landscape design needs to be taken further. Also, it is somewhat of a misconception that the building will be visible from a distance—yes, a little, but it is really on-site and in the neighborhood that you see it. Let the art enhance the site, but allow the form itself to be the focus. There is a great opportunity to use lighting to show off the facility hard at work at night. When in operation, the railyard is a very kinetic space that would be fascinating to watch. There has been some discussion of a perimeter fence and whether that could be enhanced with artwork. I'm torn between wanting to do it, but also realizing that the budget would only allow a portion of the fence to include art, thereby calling yet more attention to the parts of the fence without art.

Discussion

- Is the lost and found going to be located here—I ask because of the implications for a public entrance. *(Probably not because it would be inconvenient for people.)*
- What is happening in the railyard itself? *(We're still deciding on what material the ties and ballast will be made out of. There will be very little unfinished space, and yet the intent is to have as much permeable surface as possible. We are planning to have landscaping where pedestrians are expected.)*
- Where is the entrance: *(The main entrance is off of Airport Way. The site distances of curves are in excess of 200 feet and are fairly well centered. Some limitations as far as where switches are located.)* You're not approaching from the west? *(Since Sound transit started land acquisition, Alaskan Copper has also been assembling land and will be asking for street vacations.)*

- There is some logic to having Airport Way be the main access point—it is an easy address to find.
- How many employees will be working there? And how many car trips expected? *(Not sure yet. Probably about 250, although not all at the same time—we have shifts, but are designing for the overlap at shift changes.)*
- Will there be a cafeteria or open space? Amenities for the employees? *(Yes, we have the cafeteria on the top floor, and may do a roof garden.)*
- Provide as much landscaping as possible. *(I think putting plant materials in the right place is more important than the quantity.)*
- The landscaping is an opportunity to provide a counterpoint to the rest of the area, I keep thinking of 19th century industrial buildings with dirty, dusty plants around them!
- Does Sound Transit intend for this to be the site people associate with Sound Transit, or will that be Union Station? *(This is a utilitarian maintenance yard and isn't intended to be the corporate campus.)*
- Related to that, I am supportive of art generally, yet not inclined to spend limited art dollars here where fewer people would enjoy them. Better to save the resources for the rest of the system where passengers will experience them regularly.
- I agree, let's emphasize the entry here but not spend too much more on art on the rest of the site.
- We need to address the OCS poles in the yard, which will be as visible as the building. Show those features that only happen here. There may be a way to color code the poles to use them as a teaching tool or for informational overviews.
- Yes, this will be seen from above so find a way to explain how the railyard operates and to understand it from above.
- With this light, elegant structure showcasing beautiful trains, I question the use of bricks. Better to reflect the trains in metal?
- I disagree. Metal is a transitory finish and doesn't last very long.
- But this is a structural system being honestly shown off both inside and out. It comes down to a choice of aesthetics.
- This is an interesting juxtaposition of traditional modern elements. *(We are differentiating between the vessel where traincars predominate, and the vessel where people predominate. The "people building" is a caricature of a very large train vehicle.)*
- I am also fascinated with old shop building, but it is never about the heroic structure; it is more about the light. Keep it simple and direct. There is little value in celebrating the structure; there aren't enough people here to enjoy it. Yet, this is also a very elegant solution that shouldn't be cluttered up with HVAC equipment, drains, and other utilitarian features. Where will all that be housed? *(We aren't at that point in the design process, but yes, we have talked about assembling them and how we can keep the clarity that can be seen at this scale.)*
- Will there be a "forest of catenary poles" in the railyard—this could be a design opportunity or constraint depending on how it is approached. *(We would like to organize them in a grid or otherwise make some visual sense of them on the site. It will make for a very interesting feature at night. The site gives a different message at night than during the day—at night there is some intrigue knowing that Sound Transit is busy working to keep the system running while people are asleep.)*
- The scale of the design as you come down the slope shows that even though it's a large building, it's not the biggest one. The impact of the repetition of panels makes it extremely interesting.
- This is also true of the Beacon Hill view. This could be magical at night. Similarly the view from the train might be very interesting.

Recommendation

The Panel thanks the consultants for an excellent presentation, noting that the presentation materials were used very effectively to convey massing, scale, and detail. The Panel recommends approval of the schematic design as presented for the Maintenance Base Facility at Airport Way. The Panel specifically supports the following:

- ***Access and addressing of the facility off of Airport Way South, and***
- ***The design of the building as a direct expression of the functions inside (although with a dissenting opinion on the use of brick veneer).***

The Panel looks forward to seeing additional work on the following issues at the next phase of design review:

- ***Further discussion of how the building design will accommodate HVAC and drainage needs.***
- ***Development of how the OCS poles will be handled on-site.***
- ***Design of pedestrian areas within the railyard, with encouragement to include landscaping to support pedestrian use.***

The meeting agenda then moved to LRRP business item including approval of meeting notes from March 1, 2000 as written, distribution of an updated schedule, and a short discussion of issues to address at the upcoming LRRP retreat on March 24th.

The Panel discussed its upcoming retreat, requesting that Parks staff be invited due to their potential role with properties along MLK. Several issues were identified to address in the landscape discussion: the role of landscape architects on Sound Transit's team; corridor-wide issues and coordination with Parks and Seatran; station-specific landscape treatment; landscaping at ancillary facilities such park and rides, maintenance base, etc.; programming for landscaped/public spaces; and the design of particular streets adjacent to stations including Edmunds, Henderson, NE 43rd, 15th NE. Lastly, Marty Curry announced the Planning Commission would be hosting a Roosevelt/Northgate workshop on May 6th to discuss town center concepts, and invited the Panel to participate. Sound Transit is hosting an open house on the Roosevelt/Northgate alignment sometime in April.

The meeting adjourned at 5:30 pm.